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RESULTS OF THE GERMAN ELECTIONS.

BY WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.

THE most pressing economical needs of Germany are new commercial treaties. In that respect the result of the German general elections, held on June 16th and 25th, has met the expectations of the Imperial government.

Bismarck's immediate successor, General Count von Caprivi, in consonance with the Kaiser's own ideas, broke with the outspokenly protective and agrarian tariff policy of the Empire, and in lieu thereof substituted the present system, which may roughly be described as a protective system tempered by reciprocal regard for the interests of those Powers with which the new chancellor concluded special commercial treaties. Since the treaties for which Caprivi was responsible went into effect, Germany has taken rank as a great commercial and exporting country. When that bluff soldier-chancellor went to the Kaiser with the news that the Reichstag had just ratified the series of ten-year commercial agreements with Russia, Austria, Italy, Roumania, Argentina, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and some other countries, that monarch was so impressed with the importance of this step that he embraced the gruff old general, conferred on him on the spot the highest Prussian decoration, the Black Eagle, created him a Count of the Empire, and said: "That is a real saving deed!" And subsequent events have borne him out. A few figures, taken from German official sources, tell the story best.

Between 1892 and 1900, Germany's exports rose from 3,150 million marks to 4,752 millions, and her imports from 4,227 millions to 6,043 millions. Trade with several of the treaty countries more than doubled, and the volume of trade increased remarkably with every one of them. At the same time, exports and imports to the other countries—including both those with

which previous treaties had been made and those with which no specific agreement of any kind was in force—did not suffer; on the contrary, they, too, showed a rising tendency, especially in the case of England and the United States. It is safe to draw the conclusion, that the new tariff system was responsible for the rapid yet steady increase in the commercial and manufacturing prosperity of the young Empire.

Now, these ten-year treaties expire, nearly all of them, on December 31st, 1903. Not one has so far been renewed. The older treaty with England did expire some time ago, owing to Chamberlain's initiative, who in 1897 took the first tentative steps in that policy of inter-Imperial reciprocity which he has lately made the corner-stone of his personal ambition. He gave notice to Germany of the termination of the existing treaty, and no new one has taken the place of it, although, as a *modus vivendi*, the terms of the old one are still adhered to on both sides, with the notable exception that they do not apply to the trade between Germany and Canada. With the United States, the old treaty of 1828, originally made with Prussia and the Hanseatic Republics, is still in force.

For several years past, however, Germany has been, commercially speaking, in an unsettled condition. This has, in part, been owing to other causes, such as inflation and overspeculation; but it has also been largely due to the widespread doubt of the German commercial classes as to the Imperial government's ability to renew the commercial treaties on anything like as favorable terms and for as long a time as were provided by the old ones, and to the lack of confidence and security engendered thereby. For such doubts there seemed ample ground. The last Reichstag, elected for the period 1898-1903, fell during the last two years of its existence completely under the domination of Agrarian principles. It may be well to explain here that the Agrarian Party, so called, is really no political party in the ordinary sense, but rather is formed of the adherents of several factions in the Reichstag, the Prussian Diet and the legislative chambers of other German states; on other questions they differ widely, and they vote and act as a unit only on that one question of adequate protection to the agricultural products of the Empire. In the national parliament, the Reichstag, the followers of Agrarianism are made up of the members of the Conservative faction, of the Centre (or Ultramontane Catholic) party, and of the right wing

of the National Liberals, and together they were a majority in that body. There is, however, a separate Agrarian organization within Germany, called the Husbandry Federation (or *Bund der Landwirthe*); this organization represented extreme Agrarian views, and in certain rural districts managed to elect to the Reichstag a few of its officers and spokesmen. Once in the Reichstag, this handful of ultra-Agrarians—Baron Wangenheim, Hahn, Rösicke, Oertel, Lucke—by the violence of their language, by their uncompromising attitude, by their unmeasured demands, and by their skilful tactics, contrived to attain a degree of importance far out of proportion to their actual strength. They made their allies, the Conservatives, Centrists and National Liberals, believe that they represented in their mode of thinking a much more considerable part of the rural electorate than was really the case, and they thus succeeded in imposing their will on the rest of the Agrarian army in the Reichstag, the “Moderates.” They organized a system of terrorizing the great body of the last-named section, both in the Reichstag proper and in the Prussian Diet and outside of it. A subsidized press, laboring in the service of these ultra-Agrarians, was particularly active in inculcating their doctrine. Not alone that, however. These Agrarian fire-eaters, small in number though they really were, by their strategy also completely misled the Imperial government itself, including Count von Bülow, the Chancellor, giving him a wholly erroneous and exaggerated notion of their influence with the great body of rural voters. Under these conditions, the Imperial government, honestly believing that their excessive demands for protective duties on every kind of agricultural produce really represented the wishes of the great bulk of the soil-cultivating classes, framed a new tariff bill. This was high enough, imposing, for instance, duties on cereals of from thirty to fifty dollars a ton. But it was not high enough to suit these Agrarian “ultras.” Under their fiery rhetoric, the Agrarian majority of the Reichstag greatly modified the original bill, increasing the rate of duties on foodstuffs, making them in part prohibitive, and rendering the provisions of the bill much more stringent. In that shape, the bill became a law not long ago.

The point of this new tariff law was largely and avowedly aimed at the United States, the intention being to greatly curtail or, if feasible, entirely do away with those American imports

in cereals, meats, lards, bacon, ham, sausage, petroleum, etc., which together had for years reached the German market to the extent of hundreds of millions of dollars, and which in large measure formed the staple nutriment of the laboring classes. However, before the law could go into effect, certain formalities had to be complied with; and so it happens that it has not yet been enforced.

And then came the election. These Reichstag elections in Germany occur but every five years, and one of the disadvantages of this system, as may be incidentally gathered from the conditions described above, is that the fluctuations in public opinion remain more or less a sealed book during this interval of a lustrum. The Socialists and the Liberals made "bread usury" their slogan. At the polls, the rural electors emphatically repudiated these ultra-Agrarian leaders, and this notwithstanding the fact that the latter had stood for those constituencies in the Empire which seemed the most likely to succumb to their reasoning, and which appeared the most completely under their sway. They were defeated outright, every one of them, and not a single extreme Agrarian leader will make his appearance in the new Reichstag. Thus an incubus has been removed from Germany which, for several years, had come near to strangling her young industries and involving her in a fierce and pitiless tariff war with all her neighbors and customers. The way is now clear for the government to pursue its original purpose without let or hindrance, to conclude new commercial treaties in lieu of expiring ones. The rule of the Agrarian majority is broken. The composition of the new Reichstag is as follows: Centre, 102; Socialists, 81; Conservatives, 52; Free Conservatives, 19; National Liberals, 51; Richter Radicals, 21; Barth Radicals, 9; South German Radicals, 6; Poles, 16; Alsatians, 9; Anti-Semites, 9; Husbandry Federation and Peasants' League, 7; Guelphs, 3; Danes, 1; Independents, 11.

The Agrarians in it are to be reckoned thus: Conservatives, 71; Right Wing of Centre, 62; Husbandry Federation and Peasants' League, 7; Anti-Semites, 9; Guelphs and Alsatians, 12; Poles, 16; Independents, 5; and scattering, 5—total, 187. Of these, however, a small number, probably about 15, may be won over by the government for commercial treaties.

The majority in favor of the government's commercial treaty

policy consists of: Socialists, 81; National Liberals, 51; Radicals, 36; Left Wing of Centre, 40; and Independents and scattering, 2—total, 210.

There being in all 397 members in the Reichstag, the Pro-Treaty delegates have a narrow, but still working, majority of 23.

One feature deserves particular mention. The Socialist body of 81 (an increase of 25 over 1898) is the largest in the make-up of the Pro-Treaty party. Without them, the government could not carry this series of important measures which are to vouchsafe a recrudescence of Germany's young industrial prosperity. German politics present many curious features, but none so strange as this. For the Socialist party has been antagonized mercilessly by the Kaiser ever since his accession to the throne fifteen years ago, and he has repeatedly applied to its followers the strongest possible language. He called them once: "A horde of men unworthy to bear the name of Germans"; and in hundreds of his public utterances he has branded them the enemy of the Empire above all others. And now the irony of fate has decreed that the Socialists are to be the mainstay of the government, in that part of its policy which is to be of most far-reaching import.

This does not mean, however, that the Socialists in Germany have advanced to the dignity of a government party. It so happens that this commercial treaty part of the government programme meets the convictions and requirements of the Socialist masses, inasmuch as these treaties will furnish steady employment, at living wages, to the millions of industrial toilers, the latter being none other than the bulk of the Socialist party. In working for themselves, the Socialists incidentally and unavoidably work also for the German manufacturers and exporters, and at the same time for the nation at large, whose well-being is bound up in their own. It is not the first time that the Socialist programme has redounded to the best interests of the country and of the government, a government which spurns them. The situation was similar in 1891-94, when Count Caprivi inaugurated the commercial treaty policy and forced his measures through the Reichstag. He was able to do this only with the assistance of the Socialists, who numbered then about two score in that body, for the Conservatives and the other Agrarians opposed his policy most vigorously.

On most other measures which the German government will

present to the Reichstag during the coming four years, such, for instance, as bills for the maintenance or enlargement of army and navy, and of the whole administrative apparatus, the Socialists will be in the opposition ranks, as they have been in the past. On that class of measures, in fact, and on nearly all which are meant to strengthen and perpetuate the present monarchic and class system in the Empire, the government will find its support in those who oppose its tariff policy—the Conservatives, Centre, etc.; and a sufficient number of the Liberals and Independents can always be won over on every bill of that character to pass it.

This is one of the anomalies of German internal politics. It is the system which Bismarck once described to the writer as involving constant annoyance and anxiety to him during his long régime. There is in the strict sense no such thing as parliamentary government in Germany. There is no hard-and-fast government majority, whence measures originate and which represent the dominant trend of public opinion. It is a constant “see-saw”—now one party forming the majority on a bill, now another; the government meanwhile remaining as immovable as the polar star, no matter what the national parliament does or refuses to do.

For the service the Socialists are going to perform for the Empire, they will, of course, receive no thanks from either Kaiser or cabinet; no more than they did ten years ago for a similar service. And yet the position of their party within Germany is a much more powerful one than it was then. Their strength at the polls has been doubled since 1893. They represent three million voters, or three-eighths of the total vote cast. They have captured every Reichstag constituency in Berlin and its suburbs, save one, and that one they missed very narrowly. Their candidates triumphed in the three districts of Hamburg, in the two each of Breslau, Dresden, Leipzig, Munich. They represent, wholly or in large part, nearly every other populous and industrial centre in the Empire, like Königsberg, Kiel, Dantzic, Stuttgart, Magdeburg, Mayence, Frankfort on the Main, Barmen, Chemnitz, Stettin, Erfurt, Nuremberg, Weimar, Bremen, Lübeck, Altona, etc. Every one of the 23 election districts of the Kingdom of Saxony elected a Socialist delegate. They have demonstrated surprising strength even in the very strongholds of Catholic clerical power and in the rural Agrarian districts.

The Reichstag election districts were laid out thirty-one years ago, in conformity with the census of 1871. At that time, the rural population outnumbered the urban by sixty per cent. To-day, the urban population far outstrips the rural one. The cities have since grown enormously, while the country districts have either remained stationary or have actually lost in population. Berlin would now be entitled to eighteen seats in the Reichstag, instead of six, if redistricted according to the last official census of 1900, Hamburg and Leipzig to six and five, respectively, instead of three and two; and so on in proportion. It is precisely in these large industrial centres that the Socialists are strongest. Yet no redistricting has been ordered all this time, although the Socialist delegates have often taunted the government with the fact, and although the Radical and Liberal leaders, whose party representation likewise suffers in consequence, have formally demanded it as their right. Kaiser and government turn a deaf ear to this plaint. At any rate, by their vote of to-day, the Socialists would be entitled to about 160 seats out of the 397 in the Reichstag, instead of their 81. But, even under existing, very unfair, conditions, it was only by consolidating and voting jointly against the Socialist candidates, that the other parties in many districts snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat.

Nevertheless, as before hinted, the Socialists will remain emphatically a non-government party, and they will exert, during the Reichstag quinquennial period of 1903-08, no more influence over the internal or foreign relations of the Empire, than they have during the term just closed. This, it is not necessary to point out, is an unhealthy political condition. When the feelings and aspirations of almost one-half of the entire population are completely submerged and ignored, nay, directly and studiously antagonized, when their spokesmen, editors, and other representatives are sent to jail on every technical chance that presents itself, the political and social development of a nation cannot proceed normally.

Such, however, are the facts. We need not look, therefore, for any important alteration in Germany's foreign policy, and we may expect no modification in her internal policy except such as the exigencies in each individual case will render absolutely unavoidable. As a sop to the Socialists and to the whole laboring class the existing legislation on compulsory old age and injury insurance, invalid pensions, etc., will probably be enlarged. On

the other hand, it may be expected that all the reactionary elements in the Empire, during the coming five years, will bend their efforts towards some legislation intended to take away the general franchise, the "secret, unrestricted and cowardly ballot," as a Conservative spokesman stigmatized that institution.

For the ensuing twelvemonth and more, however, it will tax the combined skill of Kaiser and Chancellor, Count von Bülow, to the utmost to effect new commercial treaties. That task will consume the larger part of the government's energies, and other issues, unless they be weighty and admit of no delay in their adjustment, will be shelved.

There are some persons who think it likely that the Kaiser, now that the nation over which he rules has itself answered his bitter invectives and his wholesale abuse of Socialists by depositing nearly a million more ballots in favor of the latter than was done five short years ago, will turn over a new leaf. He assuredly has done this on other matters and occasions. In fact, it would be hard to name an important foreign or domestic issue on which he has not changed his mind during his reign. He is, too, open-minded on many topics and does not hesitate to publicly proclaim modifications in his faith and views. But I deem it very improbable that Wilhelm II. will change his mind about the Socialists—as yet. There is too much venom in his soul against the Socialists, venom which has been gathering, drop by drop, since 1888. He is a good hater, this Kaiser, and a rather vain and, one might almost say, conceited person, and the Socialists have hurt his feelings too often to be so soon forgiven. Still, fate is stronger than he. Not long ago, while in Copenhagen, he conversed for an hour with the Socialist mayor of that town, whom he had met at that extraordinary little Danish court—a guest there like himself. Perhaps circumstances ere long will compel him to abandon his illogical attitude towards that party whose men shape, despite all he can do, the destinies of the nation in no small degree.

But be that as it may, to conclude and ratify commercial treaties is the most urgent matter for Kaiser and cabinet just now. Of most importance in the list of these prospective treaties are those with this country, with England, with Russia, and with Austria. In each instance, the case is somewhat complicated. The commercial treaty with the United States is the old one of 1828, which concedes to both parties the rights of most-favored nations.

On both sides, though, complaint has been made that this provision has been violated again and again, not only temporarily but permanently—that is, on treaties or similar agreements concluded with other countries, or in the interpretation of tariff laws and regulations. There has been some cause given for this on either side. On the part of Germany, however, much dissatisfaction has been expressed at these conditions for years, and the wish has been insistently presented of concluding a new treaty with this country, one more in consonance with present-day requirements. The Washington government has given, years ago, adhesion in principle to this desire, and preliminary negotiations for a new treaty have been under way, both in Berlin and in Washington, for years. Owing to various causes, nothing tangible has come of this so far. One of the chief reasons which led to the appointment of so young a man as Baron Speck von Sternburg to the responsible post of German ambassador in Washington was his thorough familiarity with tariff relations existing between the two countries, and it is expected that an earnest mutual effort will now be made to conclude a new treaty between the United States and Germany. One of the main points Germany insists on is to obtain better terms for her big beet-sugar exports to this country than have been conceded to her hitherto. With the present temper of Congress, however, the work of framing a treaty which will be deemed acceptable to our interests will be an arduous one.

With England, the case is still more involved. She and her colonies have been all along Germany's most valued customer. For a number of years past, Anglo-German imports and exports have about balanced, with 200 million dollars each, to which figure trade with the British colonies has added another annual 50 or 60 million dollars. The treaty between the two countries, though, expired some time ago, notice of its termination being given at the instance of Mr. Chamberlain. No new treaty has taken its place, but the validity of the terms of the old one, saving in some particulars, is temporarily conceded on both sides from year to year, as a makeshift, of course. Meanwhile a German-Canadian tariff war broke out, owing to Canada's giving England a preferential tariff, discriminating in favor of the latter to the extent of 33 1-3 per cent., and against which Germany—under her construction of terms of the old treaty—first protested and

then took retaliatory steps. Trouble of a similar kind seems to be brewing in both South Africa and New Zealand. Of late, Mr. Chamberlain's proposed radical changes in British tariff policy have further muddled the situation, so that it is difficult to predict anything as to the ultimate outcome of the Anglo-German negotiations for a new treaty. Probably, the present precarious conditions will continue until the tariff situation in England shall have cleared.

Germany's chances in the case of Russia are distinctly brighter. For Russia has notified her neighbor of a perfect willingness to renew the existing treaty on the present terms. Under them, however, Russia has sold Germany almost twice as much as she has bought—sending rye, oats and other cereals, hemp, flax, tar, cordage, petroleum and other rawstuffs, and cattle, horses, linseed-oil, timber, and taking German dyestuffs and chemicals, machinery, dry-goods, woollens and cloths, in exchange. In Russia the competition of American manufacturers is being greatly felt of late; and, on the other hand, the German agricultural producers deem present tariff terms with Russia too favorable to the latter. If Russia could get decided concessions on her petroleum in the German market, she would agree on her part to favor German manufacturers.

With Austria and Italy, though political allies, tariff conditions are not so favorable to German interests at present as they were a decade ago. In Austria, the manufacturers have suffered greatly from German imports, while the Hungarian cereal exports to Germany have shrunk, owing to American competition. In Italy, the recent political and tariff readjustment with France has made the former less dependent on exports to Germany. But, nevertheless, Germany's existing commercial treaties with these countries will probably be renewed, substantially on the old terms.

Then, there are treaties to be renewed with Holland—the best *per capita* consumer of her goods Germany has—Belgium, Switzerland, Roumania, Argentina, and some less important countries. The whole task thus devolving upon the statesmanship of Count von Bülow and his men is one demanding much tact and skill; and, until it is completed, it will be Germany's cue to foster as much as in her lies international peace and universal prosperity.

WOLF VON SCHIERBRAND.